

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

BRIEFING AND MEDIA QUESTIONS

Thursday, September 9, 2005

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OPERATOR: Good afternoon and thank you for standing by. We'll conduct a question and answer session. To ask a question at that time, please press star one. I will now turn the call over to Dana Cruikshank, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Public Affairs.

MR. CRUIKSHANK: Thank you. This is Dana Cruikshank, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Public Affairs. I'd like to welcome you all to today's media roundtable.

Today, joining us from Mississippi Valley Division and the New Orleans area will be Mr. Walter Baumpy. We will also have Mr. Mike Logue, who can discuss operations going on in the State of Mississippi. Here in Washington, we'll have Mr. David Basham, Chief of our engineering division at USACE headquarters. And we'll also have Mr. Barry Holiday, who can talk about navigation issues on the Mississippi River and the affected area.

So with that, I will turn it over to Mr. Basham here in Washington.

MR. BASHAM: Good afternoon, everyone. I've done these a couple of times. I missed one yesterday. What I'd like to do is kind of follow the same procedure, but we're going to expand it a little bit, anticipating there might be some more interest in some areas that we've covered in the last couple days.

I'm going to ask Barry Holiday, Chief of our Navigation Group up here, to give you an update on the status of navigation in the Mississippi River and the coastal area, and then we're going to ask--I'm going to ask Mike Logue, down at Mississippi Valley Division in Vicksburg, to give you a brief update on the status of work that's going on in the State of Mississippi. And then we'll follow up at the end with a brief--with the status of work with dewatering and levee work in the New Orleans area proper.

So with that, I'm going to first turn it over to Barry Holiday.

MR. HOLIDAY: Good afternoon. Currently, I would have to describe the overall conditions as very encouraging

as far as our navigation channels go. The Port of Mobil is basically fully operational. There are some minor restrictions and the Coast Guard is still working diligently to put in some aids to navigation, to improve the 24-hour operation of shipping in that channel.

Pascagoula has some shoaling in it, but is getting close to being fully operational. There are a couple of minor obstructions that we'll remove from that channel and then this should back to functioning.

Biloxi and Gulf Port still have some restraining obstructions and some shoals in there, and the Coast Guard has those two projects still closed. The Gulf Intercoastal Waterway, the good news is that we have a fully operational Gulf Intercoastal Waterway from Texas to Florida. They did have to detour around the industrial harbor canal up in New Orleans proper and go down Baptiste Collette and then come back up, and that adds about 24 hours to the journey, but it is a viable alternative.

We have a couple of obstructions in the mouth of the Southwest Pass in the Mississippi River that we're trying to remove. We have a contractor on scene, and they're working to have those removed.

Subsequent to that, there will be a few days of effort by the Coast Guard to reinstall the aids to navigation in the Mississippi so we can get full de-draft operation back up to New Orleans and Baton Rouge.

And Port Fouchon on the west side of the Mississippi River does have some wrecks that are adjacent to the channel which cause some impacts to operations, but other than the damage to the port itself, the channel is fairly viable.

That's pretty much a synopsis at this point.

MR. BASHAM: Okay. Mike, you want to give them update of the status of the work going on in the Mississippi?

MR. LOGUE: Sure. Everything is looking great. We're in the process of standing up all of our missions under the FEMA Response Plan. We currently have debris underway in Jackson County, Mississippi, and it's moving forward, preparing to head North. The Blue Roof operations have begun in three counties and we're setting up stations as we go in different counties, again, heading North. The water and ice deliveries seem to be meeting the need in the immediate disaster area. And we're in the process of

accepting a mission to take care of about 50,000 housing units down under the Temporary Housing Program.

Our power folks are out doing assessments. We've got about a third of the assessments done. We're bringing on critical facilities, such as hospitals and emergency operation centers, and so that is moving really well.

We're also in the process of handling a lot of technical requests from the various counties and we probably have a list, a task list, right now of several hundred of those to go out and help those people evaluate their bridges, their wastewater treatment facilities, and what have you.

But so, we have our recovery field office established on the Mississippi Coast, at Keesler [ph.], and eventually we'll have what will turn out to be a full-sized district office down there. We're beginning now to set up engineer offices in all the different counties and affected sectors; and those should be coming on line as well in the next week. That's all I have.

MR. BASHAM: Okay. Walter, are you going to do the brief on--give us an update on the status of the work in the New Orleans area?

MR. BAUMY: Yes, I sure will. The--we're still working the pump station situation with the New Orleans Sewage and Water Board. More pumps are coming on line. One thing you have to recall or be aware of as we go through this process, you know, the stations have had some damage sustained, so it's going to be an iterative process of that pump starting, stopping for various minor components, lubrication and things like that. So I'm going to give you numbers or percentages, but those may change--those may be a little bit different a few hours from now.

So in Orleans Parish, I'm estimating about 25 percent of the pumping capacity is on line at this time. And that's the area we're calling New Orleans East Bank. New Orleans East we have about 35 percent of the capacity on line. St. Bernard Parish we're looking at about 35 percent, and Placaman [ph.] Parish, about 25 percent.

As far as breaches and closures, the breaches in the levee system that were experienced as a result of efforts by local interests, the storm event, and after the storm by the Federal response, those are proceeding fairly well. We've got many of them closed or they're working to

close them at this time. And we're still trying to mobilize folks out in a couple of particular areas.

And I think I'll leave it at that at this time.

MR. BASHAM: Okay. This is Don Basham again. Let's open it up to questions, and if you can, I'd like to start with any questions related to navigation, because Mr. Holiday has another commitment here shortly. So if we could start with any questions about navigation and then we can move on and open it up to the rest of the areas.

OPERATOR: Thank you. We will now begin the question and answer session. If you would like to ask a question, please press star one. You will be prompted to record your name. To withdraw your question, you may press star two. One moment for the first question.

Mat Wald from the New York Times, you may ask a question.

MR. WALD: Gentlemen, thank you for the conference call today. I wondered at what point you expect to bring on the rest of the pumps, and you had talked about a computer program that would tell you when you would have the City of New Orleans drained. I wonder are we still at

24 to 80 days or have we narrowed that down at all? Thank you.

MR. BASHAM: Walter, you want me to take an initial pass to that?

MR. BAUMY: Go ahead, Don.

MR. BASHAM: This is Don Basham. Yes, we have a model. We're working with our engineering research lab as we speak to refine that model, and when I say refine, as Walter said, it's a constant changing by minute on identifying the conditions the pumps, the status of pumps, and getting them up running. But we think we have a fairly good handle now on water surface elevations. We have some terrain models. So it is our hope that by some time early tomorrow that we're going to be able to put out some new projections. We can't begin to tell you what those are just yet, but hopefully we'll give the new projections that will be better than what we put out so far. And so if you'll just bear with us. Again, as I've said, the day before yesterday, when I was on here, we just want to make sure that we give the best information we can and not mislead folks, because we know out there there's a lot of people listening and reading what you all are writing to

get back at their homes and see what's going on in their community.

And so we want to give them the best available information we can.

So some time tomorrow, we'll put out some updated projections on--

MR. WALD: Could I ask when you say dry, does that mean there's no water in the street or is there also an issue of the water table having to go down before we can get into serious reconstruction work?

MR. BAUMY: You want to me take that, Don?

MR. BASHAM: Yeah. Go ahead.

MR. BAUMY: As soon as we get the water below the street level, I think folks can go back into the city, at the least the Federal Response folks and the local city officials to assess the areas. Once those streets are dry and they have access, they should be able to use it.

MR. BASHAM: If I could follow on with that, I would tell you the other thing that we're using this model we're developing here is to work closely with FEMA and the other responders down there so that we can try to project, you know, a few days in advance that where we think the

water is going to be receding in certain areas so that we can start getting crews in there to look at search and rescue. And so even though, it might be 30 or 40 days before we get the water pumped out of an area, let's say, obviously every day that goes by, other areas will be exposed and then we know the criticality of getting in there and start doing search and rescue and follow up and then looking at the integrity of the facilities.

So we'll also be using that model for that as well.

MR. WALD: I'm sorry. I guess I wasn't too clear on the question. In addition to being dry enough so you can get in and assess, does it have to be even dryer than that? Do you have to pump out enough to get the water table down before you can do things like let people work on underground power systems or water or sewer systems? Is it not just surface water? Is it underground water you have to pump out?

MR. : Well, if you look at the City of New Orleans, there's a series of drainage canals and underground culverts that feed the various pump stations throughout the area. So, yes, there will be water

underground and in canals, but it will be controlled at that point in time. I'm sure we'll have some large efforts trying to keep those corridors clean so that we can continue to get flow to the pump station.

MR. WALD: Thank you.

MR. BASHAM: Okay, ladies and gentlemen, I know everyone chewed up that question, but I just wanted let you know, though, that Mr. Holiday, our navigation expert, will only be available 'til 2:30 p.m. So if you have any navigation questions, please ask them now. Thank you.

OPERATOR: Ann Carnes [ph.] from Wall Street Journal, you may ask your question.

MS. CARNES: Hi. Thanks. This may fall under the heading of navigation. Has there been any progress in identifying who owns the barge that was found near the breach in the industrial canal?

MR. : Oh, yes. We have a very elaborate communication process with all of our towing companies and marine transportation companies that operate barges in the system. One of the challenges in the inner harbor canal is that there's been very little access from the outside, both because of security reasons and also just

because of the accessibility issues and high water and so forth. So I'm not quite sure I could tell you exactly whose barge it is, but I can assure you that it's very easy to figure out whose barges are whom very quickly.

MS. CARNES: But you can't say right now? I mean do you have an idea of who owns that barge?

MR. : No, I really don't.

MS. CARNES: Okay. Thanks.

OPERATOR: Chris Gozier [ph.] from Federal Times, your line is open.

MR. GOZIER: Hello, gentlemen. Thank you for your time today. I was wondering if I could ask if there are any contractors that are going to be helping with the collection of bodies in New Orleans or other areas. I've had been told that FEMA had been awarded a contract for that--had awarded a contract for that work, and I was wondering if you know who might have gotten that?

MR. BASHAM: Walter, John, do we know.

MR. RICKEY: This is John Rickey. R-i-c-k-e-y, the Public Affairs Officer down here. We do not know down here who has been awarded the contract for the management of the remains. Our focus on the remains mission is to try

to make sure that the integrity of the remains from coming into either our pump station collection points and making sure when we remove debris on those pump station collection points that we are focused on trying to make sure that if there are remains there, we discover those.

We are not linked with the FEMA folks on that particular contract. It's not a Corps of Engineers mission.

MR. GOZIER: Okay. Are there contractors involved in that mission you just described, like trying to make sure there are no bodies like in the debris that's being collected there?

MR. RICKEY: Well, we have contractor teams that are involved in the debris removal, and we have the State and local interests there that are managing the levee boards and the pump stations, as well as our Corps of Engineer folks. We are--we have no contractors from the Corps of Engineers perspective assigned to that, but every single one of our folks on the ground are cognizant of that situation and we're going to try to be very respectful of those remains.

OPERATOR: John Riley [ph.] of Newsday, you may ask a question.

MR. RILEY: Hi. I appreciate your making yourself available again today. I'm still trying to clear up questions about the initial time line with respect to the breach in the 17th Street Canal. At one of these sessions two days ago, Mr. Breerwood I believe said that the Corps or he at least first learned that there was a breach in the canal some time after midnight Monday, like 2:00 a.m. or 3:00 a.m., Tuesday morning.

But I see this morning that the Times Picayune spoke to Mr. Naomi, who said that he found out about the breach mid morning on Monday, just after the hurricane had passed and that he believes that emergency officials in Baton Rouge were notified immediately, and Colonel Wagner was quoted in the Washington Post as saying he believed that the breach occurred Monday; that they found out about the breach on Monday morning.

I guess this is a question either for Mr. Basham or Mr. Baumpy. Have you put together and figured out which of these is right when the Corps found out that there had

been a breach in the 17th Street Canal and who it was that notified higher ups that a massive flooding was inevitable?

MR. BASHAM: This is Don Basham. I'll take initial pass at that and then Walter can add to it. I think the short answer to that is no. I mean we're trying to gather all that information, but our first and primary focus right now is to get the situation under control and get the water out of the City of New Orleans. So we've got people working on that; start trying to pull that information together. Ultimately, we will have an independent evaluation of this, of people to come in and look at all of this. But, you know, it shouldn't be surprising that you talk to different people that's entered the--entered the fight here over the last few days that different people knew different information at different times. And so when you talk to them, that's the frame of reference in which they come. And we're trying to capture that as quick as we can, but we're not diverting quite frankly any energy right now from the primary mission of getting the water out of New Orleans.

MR. RICKEY: Don, this is John Rickey again. If I might add to that, I want to kind of put it in

perspective for all of you. At the same time that we were trying to gather that data, a tropical storm with hurricane gusts came through Vicksburg where all of us were at and knocked the power out of the city, severely hampering our communications. So I'm probably gonna tell you that as in the fog of war and disengagement, there's a variety of information and we're just going to have to piece altogether all the reports and all the information to get to ground truth. So I think that's why you're seeing a variety of different responses to the question.

We had massive--up until a few days ago, massive logistical problems with communications and I think that's going to require us to sort through all the data that we've collected, to come to the actual facts of when who knew what happened and when we knew it overtopped, and when the levee boards and the state and the Corps of Engineers were communicating back and forth with each other to identify when that actually happened.

QUESTION: My follow-up I guess would be, Mr. Basham, when did you find out?

MR. BASHAM: I found out midday on Monday.

OPERATOR: Our next question comes from Sheri Winston of ENR magazine.

MS. WINSTON: Hi. I'm wondering if the Corps is taking its own samples of lead and fecal coliform and other contaminants, and if so, what are your own samples revealing as far as the contamination of the water?

MR. BAUMY: This is Walter Baumpy responding. We've been in contact with the EPA and the local state officials, and I can't tell you the extent of sampling that's being taken right now but I'm confident that sampling is being done.

MR. BASHAM: This is Don Basham. Let me expand on it a little bit. We've been working very closely, all the way from the Washington, D.C. level down to the field level. That's a mission that EPA has with this disaster and so when we started getting pumps up, we established contact with them and got initial temporary license to operate. At the same time they put a team on site to start doing that sampling, both on the inside of the levee system at the pump source and then on the outside at the discharge end.

I will tell you briefly, they have done samplings that looked at volatile organic compounds, semivolatile organic compounds, total metal, pesticides, herbicides, and PCBs, and I'm sure I haven't captured all of 'em, but they're looking at those, getting samples daily and analyzing those.

QUESTION: Thank you.

OPERATOR: Janet McConnaughey from the Associated Press, your line is open.

MS. MCCONNAUGHEY: Do you have a percentage estimate of how much of the city is now above water? It was 80 percent; then 60 percent.

MR. BAUMY: I don't have an update on that today. I would still estimate in the neighborhood of 60 percent, and elaborate a bit that we're seeing drops in the water levels, maybe, in general, maybe a quarter to a half foot over the last day.

MR. BASHAM: If I could, Walter, the reason that I think you saw the tremendous--I won't say tremendous drop, but sizeable drop between the 80 and 60 in a day or two period a time, is that's the effects that you see immediately when we make the breaches in the areas we made

it, that you got a pretty good fall in water, in some cases as I recall, they're as much as a 2- to 4-foot head differential, and so that water went out very quickly and now we're down to most areas where we're just trying to-- everything else has to be evacuated by the use of either pumps that are in the system or bringing in temporary pumps.

Is that fair, Walter?

MR. BAUMY: Yeah. That's a good answer.

QUESTION: And who was that?

MR. BASHAM: This is Don Basham.

OPERATOR: Doug Swanson of Dallas Morning News, you may ask your question.

MR. SWANSON: Yeah; thank you.

Could you explain a little bit more about the actual mechanics of the original breach of the levees. I know the water overtops the wall and then it began to erode something. What did it erode?

MR. BAUMY: Walter Baumpy speaking.

If you look at a typical levee in the city of New Orleans and the outer areas, for that matter, they're generally constructed of earthen material, if at all

possible, and we build these around the perimeter and they're up to flood grade protection levels, authorized, and when you then--the next item that we do is typically you build the levee a little bit lower than the other--than the design grade, and generally for reasons that you have limited access or you have to displace numerous people.

So you try to come in with a flood wall type solution. So that flood wall is embedded into the levee section and what happens was when that water overtops, it starts washing over the wall itself. So you're gonna get some erosion behind the wall which, in turn, reduces some a your lateral support of the wall.

MR. SWANSON: Would it have been possible, at some point, to put a concrete apron over the earthen part, to guard against that, or is that just not an engineering possibility?

MR. BAUMY: There's a lotta things that are possible, I guess, looking back, but the authorized project was to protect to a certain grade, a specified design grade. The way this system has been designed, since the mid '60s, the design grade is determined and then we add freeboard above that.

So, in essence, what we're doing is we're adding insurance by moving the top of the wall higher than the design storm.

MR. SWANSON: Right.

MR. BAUMY: And so the intent was that the water would never overtop that wall.

MR. SWANSON: And what sort of material is the freeboard made of?

MR. BAUMY: It's either levee or a concrete or steel structure.

MS. SWANSON: All right. Thank you.

OPERATOR: Once again, if you'd like to ask a question press star one. At this time there are no questions. We do have one. We do have some questions again. Sorry. Janet McConnaughey, you may ask your question.

MS. McCONNAUGHEY: Okay. Is it known yet whether the barge that was near the London Canal levee is what broke it?

MR. : I don't--no. On any of the canals, we really don't know that answer at this point in time. There will be investigations done afterwards but at this time

we're still, we're concentrating on getting the water out of the city and the surrounding areas.

When I say "city," I need to clarify that cause I've said that several times. I'm talking about the greater metropolitan area that has experienced flood damage.

OPERATOR: Ann Carnes, you may ask your question.

MS. CARNES: Hi; thanks again. I have a question regarding the breach on the Industrial Canal. If I recall correctly, within a couple a days after that one was reported, the water from the surrounding neighborhoods in the 9th Ward, lower 9th Ward, was flowing back into the canal from those areas. I was wondering if that is surprising in any way. Is that where that water would be expected to flow or would it be likely that the area was already flooded from points father east and was coming into the canal cause there was no place else for it to go?

MR. BAUMY: Walter Baomy responding.

The area was inundated with water, so the water came in, filled up the bowl, in effect, and then as the lake and the Gulf receded, which you had limited openings for the water inside the bowl to recede, so in essence it

was constricted by the levee system at that point, except where you had breaches.

So that's why the lake dropped quicker than the water on the interior. So we did expect that to fully happen.

MS. CARNES: So the fact that the water was flowing out was expected due to the sort of--

MR. BAUMY: Yes; exactly. That was actually part of our plan. If breaches would not have been induced by the storm, we would have induced breaches ourself.

MS. CARNES: Okay; thanks.

OPERATOR: Pete Carey [ph] of Knight-Ridder, you may ask your question.

MR. CAREY: Yeah. Hi. Knight Ridder.

Could you tell me a little bit more about when you decided to add freeboard above the design storm level and why you did that. Or that was always part of your plan.

MR. BAUMY: Walter Baumpy again. I'll attempt to answer that.

But the project was authorized as a result of Hurricane Betsy which occurred in 1965, and, you know, the

authorization contained freeboard as--from what I recall, but I have--I don't have that in front of me.

Don, can you help me with that?

MR. BASHAM: No, I can't. Generally it's in our design criteria for levee systems, not just necessarily unique to New Orleans area, but our entire levee system throughout the country, that we add what's kind of a factor of safety and that manifests itself in this term we call freeboard.

In some cases, that could be as much as two to three feet in certain areas. So it's kind of a factor of safety we build in, that we design to the level of protection and then, you know, to account for inaccuracies in data and information and everything, we build in an extra factor of safety into that, and that's how that's arrived at.

MR. CAREY: Okay; thank you.

OPERATOR: Sheri Winston, you may ask a question.

MS. WINSTON: I wanted to get some specific status update on the breach closure work, specifically the 600-foot breach on the west bank of the London Avenue Canal and the Industrial Canal as well.

MR. BAUMY: Okay. Walter Baomy.

London Avenue, we're working on a closure actually at the Leon C. Simon Bridge, so that we can install temporary pumping, and boost the city's capacity to use their pump stations.

We're walking back to the breach with a rock road. We're working it back that way and we're gonna start filling that breach at this time.

When we get to a certain point, we'll have to see what kind a materials we can get out to the site, and my intent is to leave some sort of hole in that breach that I can feed those temporary pumps I'm installing out at the Leon C. Simon Bridge.

So once the pumps become ineffective, that they can no longer pump additional water, we'll proceed to close that breach.

The second breach further into the city is a little more difficult to get to, so we're still working plans to get to that breach.

MS. WINSTON: That's the London Avenue?

MR. BAUMY: Yes; that's London.

MS. WINSTON: So you have not been able to get to that yet?

MR. BAUMY: Well, we're just about to the first one or they may be there in the field right now. I don't have the latest update on that. But they were proceeding back that direction this morning.

MS. WINSTON: Okay; thank you.

MR. BAUMY: IHN sea breach, we made all our initial closures and we're gonna come back and reinforce that closure with some more, less pervious material. But at this point in time we should be able to pump and keep the tidal exchange from coming back into the city area.

We have folks on the ground at this time inspecting the remainder of the wall and we'll likely do some remedial actions in the entire area.

We may find some smaller breaches or areas that look compromised, not necessarily breached, so we need to shore those up to protect against that tidal exchange.

MS. WINSTON: Okay; thank you.

OPERATOR: Aaron Rosten [ph] of NBC News, you may ask your question.

MR. ROSTEN: Hello there. I wanted to ask about a de-watering plan that was drawn up in 2000, what the details of that plan were and whether that plan is-- essentially how the work is proceeding now, and also whether that plan had foreseen the possibility of a breach of a levee.

MR. : Could you repeat the last part of that question, please.

MR. ROSTEN: Well, I also wanted to ask whether that plan had discussed the possibility of a breach of a levee as happened?

MR. : Yes. That plan was put together and serves as a basis of what we're doing right now. Of course the situation with the water, what areas were flooded, influenced what we can do at this point in time and how we've reacted to date.

But we prepared that plan knowing full well that we cannot predict the damage the storm's going to do but it would serve as a basis for immediate action after the storm.

MR. ROSTEN: And in the plan, did it discuss the possibility that a levee might breach?

MR. : Yes; it sure did. Overtopping and breaching was considered.

OPERATOR: Andy Wright, ENR, you may ask a question.

MR. WRIGHT: Thank you, gentlemen, for taking the question. I was wondering how much is known about the sequence of the shutdown of the pumps are the very beginning.

Were they shut down deliberately, or did they run until they failed, or what is known about that? Thank you.

MR. BAUMY: Walter Baumpy responding.

I don't have the details on that but just in general, if you man a particular station, whether it's a lock, a pump station, floodgate, at some point in time you have to make a decision whether it's safe for the operations to be in that building, and I can't tell you how the parish has responded, but with the amount of water that was coming with this storm, I would suspect they had to give that very serious thought.

MR. WRIGHT: Walter, do they have a SKATA [ph] system or any kind a record system that could give a timeline, when you can collect that data?

MR. BAUMY: You would have to ask them that question.

MR. WRIGHT: Thank you.

OPERATOR: Meredith Ramsay of World News Tonight, you may ask your question.

MS. RAMSAY: Thank you.

I'm just wondering, you know, what are some of the challenges you're facing right now with closing these levees? I mean, is debris getting in the way? What are you facing?

MR. : We're still facing communication issues. The phones are not really up in many of the areas. Folks are on the ground running and it's hard to get information back at this point in time. So the transfer of information is most difficult with the local officials and the federal response group.

But communications are significantly improved.

The other things that are pertinent here are logistics. You know, how do you get to a particular area? Roads may not be passable at this point in time and other areas may still have water in them. So it's a challenge to

get access to that area with the type of equipment and material that's needed to respond to this type a disaster.

MS. RAMSAY: Okay. And the Industrial Canal right now. I mean, I saw something that said it was mostly fixed but leaking. Is that an accurate assessment?

MR. : I wouldn't say it's leaking. I would say that we expect to do some more remedial actions as a precaution to make sure that we don't have any problems in the event that the tidal exchange would rise above normal.

MS. RAMSAY: Okay; thank you.

OPERATOR: Doug Swanson, Dallas Morning News, your line is open.

MR. SWANSON: Thank you.

Since it's been known that New Orleans is, has been sinking for years, does that mean that the levees also have been subsiding, and, if so, was that a factor in this?

MR. BAUMY: Walter Baumpy responding again. I don't think that was a factor. You have to understand the way we construct levees. We will construct it in--excuse me! We'll go out and do initial construction on that levee and we'll build it to a certain grade that we think we can

sustain, over time, and that may be a short time of two, three, four years.

As that levee settles, we run additional surveys, and when it gets below that design grade, then we go out, we put a lift on that levee, and we also put some advanced maintenance, as we would call it, on the levee.

So we're building it above design grade, and again we do back and we monitor that settlement, see how it matches the engineering calculations, and when it gets below design grade there's another lift added to that levee.

So many of these levees have had three lifts on them.

MR. SWANSON: Lifts would be another layer of--

MR. BAUMY: Of soil.

MR. SWANSON: Okay.

MR. BAUMY: It's a continuous process. The soils are soft and we do get subsidence, we know that, we expect it, and that's part of our process in designing and building levees.

MR. SWANSON: Would floodgates within the canals have helped the situation last week?

MR. BAUMY [?]: It's hard to predict that at this point in time. I would prefer floodgates at this point, no doubt, but we did sustain damage on the floodgates at Bayou Bienvenue and Dupree, so it's--that solution needs to be engineered to determine what is the best solution at this time.

MR. SWANSON: Thank you.

OPERATOR: Don Riley, Newsday, you may ask your question.

MR. RILEY: I have a question about the navigability of the Mississippi River in the aftermath of the storm. It sounds like your navigability guy may be gone but maybe somebody on the line knows the answer anyhow.

Basically I'm just curious whether the river was navigable following the storm, whether barges with supplies or whatever could have been brought either from the north or from the south or whether the river was somehow blocked, obstructed, unusable as a transportation channel following the storm.

MR. KENNEDY: This is Barry Kennedy from the headquarters of the Corps. Yes, the Mississippi River was

navigable for shallow draft traffic. You mentioned barges. Yes, it remained navigable for shallow draft barges. It's navigable today even but is limited to daylight hours until the aids to navigation are restored by the Coast Guard.

There are two obstacles in the very bottom of the river, the area called Southwest Pass, and we have a contractor out there today searching for those obstacles. They may have drifted recently. Sometimes they even get blown out of the river, end up in the Gulf and just disappear. So we're searching for them now and when we find them we'll remove them.

MR. : It was navigable and has been navigable from either direction into New Orleans?

MR. KENNEDY: For shallow draft only. Because of those two obstacles in the channel of the river, deep draft vessels couldn't go in.

MR. : That would have been from the direction of the ocean there were obstacles?

MR. KENNEDY: From either direction, either going up the river or down the river or at the mouth of the river the draft was restricted by those obstacles that we detected in the channel. The draft was restricted to about

38 feet which is about 7 feet shallower than the authorized draft of the river.

MR. : Thank you.

MR. KENNEDY: You're welcome.

OPERATOR: Ron Fields, Burlington Hawk Eye. You may ask a question. Mr. Fields, please check your mute button.

MR. FIELDS: On the same vein of navigation, what is the condition of the facilities down there in the navigation channels for the upcoming Midwest harvest and all the grain that's going to be pouring into the South?

MR. KENNEDY: This is Barry Kennedy from headquarters. The Mississippi River probably will open to full deep draft navigation, it's a rough guess at this time, but probably in 7 to 10 days. The main thing it's relying on how is removing those two obstacles and putting in the aids to navigation that help pilots navigate the river. So we would expect in 7 to 10 days the river will probably be operating pretty much in a normal manner again.

MR. FIELDS: Do you have any idea what the obstacles are?

MR. KENNEDY: Not yet. Our contractors are out there right now looking for them. They were detected I believe by side glancing radar. The contractors are surveying right now looking for them.

MR. FIELDS: Thank you.

MR. KENNEDY: You're welcome.

OPERATOR: Pat Boston (ph) of NBC News. You may ask your question.

MR. BOSTON: This is question about maintenance, and I don't know what kind of maintenance is done to these levee walls on the canals, but when was the last time there was maintenance done on any of the areas where there was a breach and what kind of maintenance would it have been?

MR. BAUMY: This is Walter Baumpy responding. Each levee district is set up depending on the location. You've got the Orleans Levee District, the Lake Borgne Levee District and so forth. They have annual inspections with the Corps of Engineers and other agencies, state agencies, to inspect these facilities. So they're out there on a continuous basis.

They have folks taking care of needs in the area. They have to go out and look at the channels, cut the grass

and so forth. So they're trained and they know what to look for on these levees so that it's a continuing process.

MR. BOSTON: I don't know if anybody has had time obviously to look at any of the records so far or check what the inspections showed, but did they show anything anomalous?

MR. BAUMY: No. We haven't gone back to check that, but I can say that the levee districts have received numerous awards for their outstanding maintenance on their facilities.

MR. BOSTON: So any maintenance would have been done by the board or the district rather than the Army Corps of Engineers?

MR. BAUMY: Yes, that's correct.

MR. BOSTON: Do you know of any maintenance that was done?

MR. BAUMY: I can't site that at this time.

MR. RICKEY: This is John Rickey, the public affairs officer. I can tell you in previous conference calls that it has been discussed that prior to the storm the local levee boards went out and walked the levees, the particular levees involved were cited by Al Naomi as being

recognized as Walter said for their outstanding work. At this point in time we know of no deficiencies in those levees reported by the levee boards.

MR. BOSTON: Nobody on this phone call has done that walk though?

MR. RICKEY: That is correct.

MR. BOSTON: Also just briefly if you don't mind, when were these specific levee walls or these flood walls and levees built? I understand it was about 15 years ago or so. Do you know?

MR. RICKEY: I don't have that date for you here, but I don't think it was that long. I would say the mid-'90s on the London Avenue Canal. The 17th Street Canal I'm going to give you a guess which is about 15 years, and the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal, those walls have probably been there since the late-'60s or early-'70s.

MR. BOSTON: Then finally, that dewatering or unwatering plan of 2000, is there a way you can distribute that?

MR. : Let us check on that. I don't know why we wouldn't be able to.

MR. BOSTON: Thanks.

OPERATOR: Ann Carnes (ph) of the Wall Street Journal, you may ask a question.

MS. CARNES: My question also is also related to the dewatering plan. I wanted to just clarify that it was an Army Corps developed plan and where we can access it.

MR. BAUMY: I can't tell you where we can access. John is going to check into that for us. No, it was not developed totally by the Corps of Engineers. We worked with our local counterparts to get their input and also put this plan together because it takes a group effort here. We can't do this by ourselves and neither can they.

MS. CARNES: But the plan was specifically on how to dewater the city following a hurricane?

MR. BAUMY: Yes, that's what it addressed. It was not--again, as I alluded to earlier, it's not a specific plan that says A, B, C, D, E, here's the steps and go ahead and execute it. It's a conceptual plan that can be adapted to the situation at hand and that serves as the basis of reacting to the storm.

MR. BASHAM: This is Basham in the headquarters. Let me expand on that just a little bit. The plan that's there has a number of different I guess kind of scenarios.

Even in the most minor case where we would have had a Category 3, you still would have had most likely a lot of water that would have been dumped in the New Orleans area proper and in the surrounding parishes. So that plan would have even recognized going in there and having to--breaches and location of those beaches. I think there's tables in there that says depending on the size of that breach, the amount of water you expect to evacuate out of that particular area. So it looked at a number of different things that would have had to be considered in an extreme storm event, that just because you have an area that's below sea level and you have water levels that are above that level on the outside, so you have to look at all the different combinations and events that could occur not just necessarily just exclusively based on the fact that you would have a levee breach.

MS. CARNES: But in prior calls and in published reports there's been statements that there was no way a breach would have been anticipated, but it seems that if you have a plan to dewater the city that includes a breach that that doesn't make any sense.

MR. BASHAM: I'll let Walter and them down there comment on this, took, but I think the comment was made in the context that does the dewatering plan specifically identify areas where we think there's going to be failed breaches? No. We have to anticipate that there could be breaches in any one of the parishes, and this plan tries to look at and address if you have a breach how would you go about addressing it.

Again, that has to be in a conceptual view because just like the situation here with the category of this hurricane, the transportation becomes a tremendous issue, the communication, accessibility, getting equipment, materials and people back into the area to get access to it, all of that conceptually can be thought about, but until you identify the specific location, then the plan becomes very specific at trying to address that issue. Walter?

MR. BAUMY: Yes, let me add just a little bit to that. The plan was put together assuming the flood protection system would stay in tact and we were looking for areas where the water would naturally drain to and where it would make sense to breach the levee so that you

have a controlled breach and you don't lose control of that breach where it widens to something larger than necessary to do the job because you have to go back and repair that afterwards.

So that was one of the primary drivers, that and the pump station situation on how would you proceed in getting those pump stations back on line. We wanted to make sure that we were engaged fully with our local sewage and water boards in dealing with that.

But the idea of the breach was if the levee system would be in tact as expected, then we would have a vast amount of water in the city and the pump stations would likely be incapacitated because they have been flooded and they sustained some damage that would require remedial actions to reduce the water levels inside. So the controlled breaches would then open up the system back to the elevations of the lake, permitting water to flow out in fairly quick fashion. That's pretty much what you saw when we were successful in opening breaches in the lower Plaquemines and the St. Bernard areas. The water dropped fast and got a good bit of water out of the system.

MS. CARNES: But just to clarify then, are you saying that this dewatering plan anticipated controlled breaches of the levees?

MR. BAUMY: Yes.

MS. CARNES: Or you'd anticipated failure of the levees?

MR. BAUMY: No, it anticipated controlled breaches to let the water out at a quick pace.

MS. CARNES: Thanks.

OPERATOR: Chris Gozier (ph) of Federal Times.
Your line is open.

MR. GOZIER: I was wondering if I could ask you a follow-up to my question before.

Mr. Rickey, you mentioned that there were contractor teams that are involved in the debris removal. Can you tell me who are some of the contractors that are involved in that?

MR. RICKEY: There's a variety of them. There's a contractor initiative that we have in partnership as part of the FEMA. You have Ashkritt (ph). I'm going to let Mike Logue answer that because he's been involved in more hurricanes

MR. LOGUE: Yeah. This is Michael Logue. L-o-g-u-e.

MR. : Okay.

MR. LOGUE: Public Affairs Officer for the Vicksburg District. We have the recovery mission on the Gulf Coast. One of the contractors, for example, we're using in Mississippi and Alabama is Ashbritt [ph.]. I think some of you will be familiar with them.

MR. : Right.

MR. LOGUE: They are in position and on the ground now in Mississippi. At some point in time, they will back away, and the normal contracting process will take over. But they are part of that advanced contractor initiative where these folks are ready to move out, get on the ground, help us early on, and then eventually move back to a more routine contracting process.

MR. : Okay. Can you name some other companies, too? Like are there other contractors that would be involved in the work of going through the debris and perhaps picking out any bodies that might be involved in that? Like would Ashbritt be involved in that or would that be other companies?

MR. LOGUE: That I can't define, because that's assigned to FEMA. I'll have to let them address that.

MR. : Okay. Okay. Thank you.

OPERATOR: At this time, there are no questions.

MR. CRUIKSHANK: Okay. This is probably a good time to wrap up then. I want to thank everyone for your participation.

MR. VOLK: Just one more thing just to go back a little bit on the breaches. This is Ed Volk [ph.], Headquarters, Corps of Engineers, Public Affairs. The--I mean the plan anticipated--just to clarify, we did anticipate both that there could be storm induced breaches that would take place; that would be part of what we need to respond to; and also anticipated that we might need to create breaches for the purpose of letting some of the flood water down through gravity.

They both were in the plan in that sense.

OPERATOR: Would you like us to take another question?

MR. CRUIKSHANK: Yeah. We can take one more question.

OPERATOR: Okay. Janet McConaughey [ph.], the Associated Press, your line is open.

MS. MCCONAUGHEY: Okay. Do you have any figures on how many of the channel markers and other navigation aids are missing at this point?

MR. KENNEDY: This is Barry Kennedy, Headquarters. No. We're still--that's primarily a mission of the U.S. Army--I mean the U.S. Coast Guard to restore those aids to navigation. Of course, we work very closely with them, but we don't get involved in keeping a tally of which navigable aids are missing or. Our main concern is that they all be in place so that the river can be declared open for full navigation 24 hours a day.

MR. CRUIKSHANK: Okay. Thank you very much, gentlemen. As usual, we will have the transcript out probably by 5:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, at www.usace.army.mil. Again, it should be around 5:00 p.m. It might be give or take an half hour. Thank you very much and we are currently planning on having this call again tomorrow at two o'clock at the same number and the same pass code. Thank you very much.

This concludes our conference.

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